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Abstract

As George Lamming once remarked, over three quarters of the contemporary world has been directly and profoundly affected by imperialism and colonialism. Although it is clear just how profound an effect this has had on the social and political structures of the twentieth century and on the relations which exist between nations in our age, it has until recently been less clear how profoundly this has influenced the perceptive frameworks of the majority of people alive now. The day to day realities of colonized peoples were in large part generated for them by the impact of European discourses. But the contemporary art, philosophies and literature produced by post-colonial societies are not simply continuations or adaptations of European models. The processes of artistic and literary i/^colonization have involved a radical dis/mantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses. This has frequently been accompanied by the demand for an entirely new or wholly recovered 'reality', free of all colonial taint. Given the nature of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, with its pandemic brutalities and its cultural denigration, such a demand is desirable and inevitable. But as the contradictions inherent in a project such as Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike's The Decolonization of African Literature demonstrate,' such pre-colonial cultural purity can never be fully recovered.

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Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse

As George Lamming once remarked, over three quarters of the contemporary world has been directly and profoundly affected by imperialism and colonialism. Although it is clear just how profound an effect this has had on the social and political structures of the twentieth century and on the relations which exist between nations in our age, it has until recently been less clear how profoundly this has influenced the perceptive frameworks of the majority of people alive now. The day to day realities of colonized peoples were in large part generated for them by the impact of European discourses. But the contemporary art, philosophies and literature produced by post-colonial societies are not simply continuations or adaptations of European models. The processes of artistic and literary *de*colonization have involved a radical dis/mantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses. This has frequently been accompanied by the demand for an entirely new or wholly recovered 'reality', free of all colonial taint. Given the nature of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, with its pandemic brutalities and its cultural denigration, such a demand is desirable and inevitable. But as the contradictions inherent in a project such as Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike's *The Decolonization of African Literature* demonstrate,[1] such pre-colonial cultural purity can never be fully recovered.

Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridised, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity. Decolonization is process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling. Since it is not possible to create or recreate national or regional formations independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise, it has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European dis-

courses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within (and between) two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world.

Thus the rereading and rewriting of the European historical and fictional record are vital and inescapable tasks. These subversive manoeuvres, rather than the construction of the *essentially* national or regional, are what are characteristic of post-colonial texts, as the subversive is characteristic of post-colonial discourse in general. Post-colonial literatures/cultures are thus constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices, and they offer 'fields'[2] of counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse. The operation of post-colonial counter-discourse[3] is dynamic, not static: it does not seek to subvert the dominant with a view to taking its place, but to, in Wilson Harris's formulation, evolve textual strategies which continually 'consume' their '*own* biases'[4] at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse.

I want now to turn to the ways in which post-colonial literatures in english, and this particular reading of the post-colonial, challenge the traditional discipline of cross national comparative studies, and suggest where such a reading fits in terms of the ways in which 'Commonwealth' literature studies have been theorised and practiced. I am taking Comparative literature in this context in the narrow sense of the term, to refer to the discipline which constitutes itself under that title, though arguably much contemporary literary theory involves comparative literary studies, and as such does not invoke the particular problems I have with Comparative Literature (capital C).

Comparative Literature Studies, as they have been constituted and practiced in Europe and the United States, have stressed extra- rather than intra-linguistic comparisons, have concentrated on European cultures and literatures, and have often implicitly assumed, even where this has not been explicitly stated, that the ultimate purpose of the comparison is universalist, and therefore, from my point of view, problematically hegemonic: 'When Latin lost its position as a «universal» language, and growing nationalisms divided Europe more and more, comparative literature studies assumed new functions: that of restoring a lost unity and universality...'[5] Although this is advanced by Prawer in his *Comparative Literature Studies: An Introduction* as a feature of the history of the discipline rather than a current practice, nevertheless much of the later material suggests that universality remains an ideal, and that the hegemonic relation so implied is quite acceptable. Austrian and Swiss

writers like Stifter and Keller are congratulated for regarding themselves 'as writers within the great German tradition of literature' in spite of 'their attachment to their native region'.[6] Moreover, attempts to define just what might constitute separate language groups appeal to the common sense notion of difference, and sweep troubling problems of dialect and power into the footnotes. And although Prawer sees as 'not the least important task of those furthering comparative literature studies a broadening of the terms of reference sufficiently to break down what remains of ... cultural imperialism',[7] the entire field seems frustrated by its refusal to confront its own inherently political constitution. The emphasis on European cultures, the ideal of 'universality', and the stress on 'great traditions' perpetuate a political conservatism or blindness which sidesteps the interesting challenges the 'margins' of any constituted subject inevitably pose. It seems to me that a study of discourses operating within one language group, say, Prawer's German example, might open the field to many more exciting developments both within and between various major language groups than its centrist philosophy has so far encouraged.

Well before Chinweizu drew attention to the appropriating effect of the ambiguity in the phrase, 'English Literature', employed to cover works written in the language, english, *and* the literature of a particular culture, England, writers and critics in the post-colonial English-speaking world had unconsciously or deliberately been engaged in counter-discursive responses to the dominant tradition. Once colonial Calibans transported the language or had it imposed on them, they used it to curse and to subvert. One of the earliest sites of direct attack apart from institutional and commercial control of the means of production of literature, was the notion of 'literary universality'. This had fostered the centrality of the dominant discourse by enshrining the values of one particular culture as axiomatic, as literary or textual givens, and invoked policies of either assimilation or apartheid for the remainder of the English-speaking world. Either one wrote 'like the English', having thereby 'transcended' the merely 'local' and thus gained entry to the great imperial club, or, more frequently, one insisted on the local and thus remained irredeemably provincial. European hegemonic manoeuvres of this kind can wear a number of masks. The most recent consists in the use of the term 'post-modern' and the practices of some post-structuralist critics, a good number of which, like the 'experiments' of the post-modern text, have themselves been inspired by direct cross-cultural or colonial experience, or are in fact post-colonial experiments. (The New Zealand writer, Vincent O'Sullivan, recently remarked that the first 'post-modern' text

was Melville's *The Confidence Man*, and that this is of course a post-colonial novel.) But like literary universality, these terms and categorisations act to appropriate to a continuing European hegemony any texts that will 'fit' and to marginalise those that refuse Euro-cultural assimilation.

In challenging the notion of literary universality (or the European appropriation of post-colonial practice and theory as post-modern or post-structuralist) post-colonial writers and critics engage in counter-discourse. But separate models of 'Commonwealth Literature' or 'new Writing in English' which implicitly or explicitly invoke notions of continuation of, or descent from, a 'mainstream' British literature, consciously or unconsciously reinvoke those very hegemonic assumptions *against* which the post-colonial text has, from its inception, been directed. Models which stress shared language and shared circumstances of colonialism (recognising vast differences in the expression of British imperialism from place to place) allow for counter-discursive strategies, but unless their stress is on counter-discursive fields of activity, such models run the risk of becoming colonisers in their turn. African critics and writers in particular have rejected these models for their apparently neo-assimilative bases, and opted instead for the national or the pan-African. But if the impulse behind all post-colonial literatures is seen to be counter-discursive, and it is recognised that such strategies may take many forms in different cultures, I think we have a more satisfactory model than any loose national grouping based on felt marginality can offer, and one which perhaps avoids some of the pitfalls of earlier collective models or paradigms. Moreover, such a model can account for the ambiguous position of say, white Australians, who, though still colonised by Europe and European ideas, are themselves the colonisers of the original Aboriginal inhabitants. In this model, all post-invasion Aboriginal writing and orature might be regarded as counter-discursive to a dominant 'Australian' discourse and beyond that again to its European progenitor. It is this model I wish to take up later in considering J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* which explores the problem of white South African settler literature in relation to the continuing oppression by whites of the black majority.

The alternative to providing some kind of model or field in terms of which to consider literatures in english is the national or regional study, and this has been the way in which these literatures have most frequently been considered. This does, however, run the risk of a continuing marginalisation or ghettoisation, especially outside the particular country or region concerned, and excludes what are obviously fruitful compari-

sons between cultures and literatures which employ a dis/placed language in counter-hegemonic relation to its 'place' of origin. And, as Homi Bhabha has noted, national quests for cultural self-ratification and hence origination replicate imperial cognitive processes, reinvoking their values and practices in an attempted constitution of an independent identity. 'Although the refractions of a Western tradition are accepted as ironical (if not tragic), the demand for a literary tradition, a history, is put in exactly the same historicist and realist terms — the familiar quest for an origin that will authorise a beginning.'[8]

Frequently, too, the construction of the 'essentially' Nigerian or the 'essentially' Australian invokes exclusivist systems which replicate imperial universalist paradigms. For all these reasons, strategic and philosophical, I think national models do ultimately prove unsatisfactory, though it is from national positions that much of the active support for the study of literatures in english has come. And it is nation-based literary associations and individuals who still fight the good fight against the continuing hegemony of British literature and European culture in our universities.

In these days of increasing fetishisation of theory, a constituted field or subject needs a firmer foundation than one which consists in a loose association of nations or regions whose grouping is facilitated by a 'common' language. It is possible to formulate at least two (not necessarily mutually exclusive) models for future post-colonial studies. In the first, the post-coloniality of a text would be argued to reside in its discursive features, in the second, in its determining relations with its material situation. The danger of the first lies in post-coloniality's becoming a set of unsituated reading practices; the danger in the second lies in the reintroduction of a covert form of essentialism. In an attempt to avoid these potential pitfalls I want to try to combine the two as overarching models in the reading of two texts by stressing counter-discursive strategies which offer a more general post-colonial reading *practice* or practices. These practices, though, are politically situated; sites of production and consumption are inextricably bound up with the production of meaning. The site of communication is of paramount importance in post-colonial writing, and remains its most important defining boundary. In investigating 'fields' of counter-discursive strategies within post-colonial counter-discourse, I have adapted the Canadian Dennis Lee's term:

> The metaphor of the field, invoking the idea of an unseen but definable force which patterns the particles that fall within its influence, furnishes ... a way of talking about the overall structures that govern the relationships among a collection of separable items. (In physics a field can only be perceived by inference from the relationships of

the particles it contains; the existence of the field is, however, entirely separate from that of the particles: though it may be detected through them, it is not defined by them.)[9]

An adaptation of this concept seems particularly suitable for post-colonial literatures, in that it avoids the problems of a post-colonial essentialism (undesirable in any case as recursively imperialistic or assimilative), yet allows for the constitution of coherent fields of activity across diverse national, regional and racial boundaries. Within the broad field of the counter-discursive many sub-groupings are possible and are already being investigated. These include 'magic realism' as post-colonial discourse,[10] and the re/placing of carnivalesque European genres like the picaresque in post-colonial contexts, where they are carried to a higher subversive power. Stephen Slemon has demonstrated the potential of allegory as a privileged site of anti-colonial or *post*-colonial discourse.[11]

But the particular counter-discursive post-colonial field with which I want to engage here is what I'll call *canonical counter-discourse*. This strategy is perhaps most familiar to you through texts like Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and it is one in which a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes. An important point needs to be made here about the discursive functions of textuality itself in post-colonial worlds. Texts constructed those worlds, 'reading' their alterity assimilatively in terms of their own cognitive codes. Explorers' journals, drama, fiction, historical accounts, 'mapping' enabled conquest and colonization and the capture and/or vilification of alterity. But often the very texts which facilitated such material and psychical capture were those which the imposed European education systems foisted on the colonized as the 'great' literature which dealt with 'universals'; ones whose culturally specific imperial terms were to be accepted as axiomatic at the colonial margins. Achebe has noted the ironies of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* being taught in colonial African universities.

Understandably, then, it has become the project of post-colonial literatures to investigate the European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-colonial space and to intervene in that originary and continuing containment. In his study of nineteenth century France, Richard Terdiman saw what he calls 'textual revolution' as partly conditional on the 'blockage of energy directed to structural change of the social formation'.[12] But he goes on to note that even so, 'Literary revolution is not revolution by homology, but by *intended function*.'

Literary revolution in post-colonial worlds has ben an intrinsic component of social 'disidentification'[13] from the outset. Achebe's essay, 'The Novelist As Teacher'[14] stresses the crucial function of texts in post-colonial social formations and their primacy in effecting revolution and restitution, priorities which are not surprising given the role of the text in the European capture and colonization of Africa. Post-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified 'local'. *Wide Sargasso Sea* directly contests British sovereignty — of persons, of place, of culture, of language. It reinvests its own hybridised world with a provisionally authoritative perspective, but one which is deliberately constructed as provisional since the novel is at pains to demonstrate the subjective nature of point of view and hence the cultural construction of meaning.

Just as Jean Rhys writes back to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, so Samuel Selvon in *Moses Ascending* and J.M. Coetzee in *Foe* (and indeed throughout his works) write back to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Neither writer is simply 'writing back' to an English canonical text, but to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds. Like William Shakespeare's *The Tempest, Robinson Crusoe* was part of the process of 'fixing' relations between Europe and its 'others', of establishing patterns of reading alterity at the same time as it inscribed the 'fixity' of that alterity, naturalising 'difference' within its own cognitive codes. But the function of such a canonical text at the colonial periphery also becomes an important part of material imperial practice, in that, through educational and critical institutions, it continually displays and repeats for the other, the original capture of his/her alterity and the processes of its annihilation, marginalization, or naturalisation as if this were axiomatic, culturally ungrounded, 'universal', natural.

Selvon and Coetzee take up the complex discursive field surrounding *Robinson Crusoe* and unlock these apparent closures.

In *Moses Ascending* Selvon reinvokes a character from an earlier work, *The Lonely Londoners*, one whose Commonwealth adventures we can follow further in *Moses Migrating*. It is important, I think, to situate Moses within Selvon's work as a whole, just as it is with Coetzee's *Foe*, for like the works of Wilson Harris, a complex process of 'rehearsal'[15] is taking place here. Through Moses' adventures two of the most important motifs in post-colonial literatures, the journey and the house are also scrutinized. In *The Lonely Londoners* Moses and his companions journey from

what they regard as their Caribbean margins to the centre of Empire, London, where for most of that novel they lead precarious existences. But in *Moses Ascending* Moses is able to purchase Tolroy's House and become a landlord, presiding over a menagerie of Commonwealth boarders — Flo from Barbados, Ojo the African, Alfonso the Cypriot, Macpherson from Australia, the elusive Faizull/Farouk from Pakistan, some of whom, interestingly enough, are engaged in subversive activities. Macpherson seems to be in the drug business judging by his anxiety over parcels, and Faizull/Farouk are smuggling illegal immigrants into England.

Moses Ascending is one of the most comic novels in the english language, and one of the most complex in terms of the counter discursive strategies it invokes. A thoroughly colonized Trinidadian, Moses, after twenty years of struggling, sets himself up as 'landlord', casts off (or attempts to cast off) his old acquaintances and friends, and to crown his success as a Crusoe/Prospero he employs a white Caliban/Friday, Bob, from the 'wilds' of England, the 'Black Country' of the Midlands. Moreover, the now successful Moses is writing his Memoirs. As Eddie Baugh points out,

> This work is important to him not only as the act of self-definition which memoirs tend to be, but even more so because it will display his supposed mastery of English. To have arrived is, in its ultimate expression, to have arrived linguistically. He is bent on 'showing white people that we, too, could write book'.[16]

We never see Moses' actual memoirs - instead, Moses' first-person narration of his day-to-day doings, his *unofficial* record becomes the means of subverting the assumptions which lie at the heart of *Robinson Crusoe* and which have formed the foundations of the colonization process that has brought Moses to his present position and inspired him to write his Memoirs (capital 'M'). In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* language appears to be as unproblematical as it is for Prospero. It is 'language', not *Prospero*'s language that Caliban has been taught. Language in Defoe's novel is apparently as clear as glass. It is simply the vehicle for the conveying of 'reality'. But in *Moses Ascending* it is made deliberately opaque; the 'struggle over the word' is thematised in the different discourses which pervade the novel and is characteristic of Moses' richly hybridized speech with its Trinidadian base. Throughout the novel numerous forms of englishes are used. There are Brenda's BBC English, the American Black Panther rap of BP, and Moses' imitation of the Australian speech of Macpherson (What can I do for you, cobber?),[17] and the gangsterland lingo of American movies, 'IF LANDLORD NOSY

EXTERMINATE HIM' (70) adopted by Faizull/Farouk, and Moses' own favourite archaisms:

> Bob had a swig, look thougtful, then say, 'Much against my will, I gravely suspect it is only because they are black. No whites were captured.'
>
> I was thunderstruck. 'God's blood,' I cried, 'They have gone too far this time. To arms!'
>
> 'Hold your water,' Bob say, 'Cool it.'
>
> 'Cool it?' I mock him. 'Egad, man, they have really irked my ire now. Come, let us away.' (p. 105)

The presence of so many competing English voices completely subverts the possibility of any re-establishment of the idea of a standard or 'norm' beyond the one appropriate to character in cultural time and place, but since these are Moses' memoirs (small m), modified Trinidadian is in fact the language of thought and narrative voice within which the English dialects of Brenda and Bob are enclosed. Thus the culture which insisted on one 'proper' form of one language and which convinced Moses he must write like that to become English landed gentry is totally undercut.

But if englishes provide the subversive 'languages' in which Selvon writes the novel, it is not the mode in which Moses intends to write *his* Memoirs. These will be in 'the Queen's English'. It is black British Brenda who causes him most pain when she criticizes his opus not because, as Galahad had done, she ridicules its subject matter, but because she laughs at his language and style. She has 'ridiculed the very foundation of my Memoirs hurling contempt and defamation on my use of the Queen's language' (114). His capture of his language would put the seal on his house ownership and his appropriation of Prospero's 'book', and make him truly Crusoe in Crusoe's city. 'I will knock them in the Old Kent Road with my language alone ... my very usage of English will have them rolling in the aisles' (86). But although Moses' pretensions are sent up in the novel and his distance from the concerns of 'real' life and 'real' speech castigated by Galahad and Brenda, it is the eccentricities of the English language which are exposed; its clichés and its assumptions, and the implications of its genres; the self-referring project of Memoirs or diary, and the imposition of English culture and its forms as axiomatic throughout the colonial world.

Nowhere is this more forcefully evoked than in the clichéd sayings concerning race that Bob and Moses use. Bob, from the heart of England's 'Black Country' congratulates Moses on having arranged a party for him with 'Damned white of you, old boy' (131), and Moses, in detailing the way in which the British police victimize blacks, comments 'It does seem

to a black man that though he is pure and white as the driven snow ... that it got something, somewhere, sometime, what he do wrong, and that even if it don't exist, the police would invent one, to trap him' (37).

But when Moses discovers to his horror towards the end of the novel that English Bob can neither read nor write, he resolves to teach him the alphabet. Moses turns his thoughts to 'this poor white man who could not read or write'.

> I could understand the ignorance of the black, backwards people, but I have a soft spot for whites. It was beyond my ken that Bobbie didn't know that c-a-t make cat...
>
> A-for-apple? I say coaxingly.
>
> Bobbie look at me blankly.
>
> 'B-for-Bat?' I try again.
>
> 'What's up with you?' he ask.
>
> 'Don't look so bloody pleased with yourself, I say you don't have to bask in your darkness.' (p. 138)

Moses (like Crusoe) resolves to teach his Bob/Friday the Bible when he has the time.

The multiple ironic inversions which pervade the novel draw attention to the major effects of colonialism. But Selvon's subversions of British centrality in terms of language, point of view and so on, do not simply involve inversions of the Crusoe/Friday paradigm (though this is certainly part of it). More complexly, the novel explores the means through which Moses was himself constructed by the imperially axiomatic, and it exposes that construction, taking the imperial urge to conquer and control and colonize back to its specific cultural roots evidenced through language and in text, and draws attention to the power of language and text in the subjectification of colonial peoples. Though Moses knows all the English classics intimately, he is ignorant of his own Caribbean 'canon':

> 'What shit is that you writing?' [asks Galahad]
>
> 'I am composing my Memoirs,' I say stiffly, hoping that my tone would put him off.
>
> ...
>
> '...who tell you you could write?'
>
> 'I am not an ignoramus like you,' I say, beginning to loose my cool.
>
> 'You think writing book is like kissing hand? You should leave that to people like Lamming and Salkey.'
>
> 'Who?'
>
> Galahad burst out laughing. Derisively, too. 'You never heard of them?'
>
> 'I know of Accles and Pollock, but not Lamming and Salkey.'
>
> 'You see what I mean? Man Moses, you are still living in the Dark Ages! You

don't even know that we have created a Black Literature, that it have writers who write some powerful books what making the whole world realise our existence and struggle. ... How you expect to stay lock up in your room, and don't go and investigate and do research, and take part in what is happening, and write book?'

'Let me remind you that literary masterpieces have been written in garrets by candlelight, by men who shut themselves away from the distractions of the world.'

'That's a lot of shit!'

'You are overstaying your welcome,' I say coldly.

'I going,' Galahad say, getting up to go, 'but you *gone*, man!' (pp. 49-50)

Relegated at the end to the basement through the machinations of Bob, Jenny and Brenda (the former now occupying his penthouse) Moses finds himself 'kicking aside a batch of Lamming's *Water For Berries* that was in my way to stand up by the window' (p. 147). Like Caliban, Moses (for attempted 'rape' — following in the footsteps of his English mentor in this field, Bob) has been exiled to his basement/rock by Bob. Bob is now in possession of the Moses/Prospero/Crusoe's 'books', his technological magic, the written word, having taught himself (with Moses's help) to read and write. So the novel ultimately shows the possession of language/writing as fundamental to imperial control, and although Moses' voice is the one that persists to the end, he has definitely descended from his ascendant post at the beginning. He concludes by explaining that all may not yet be over 'I have an epilogue up my sleeve' (149), but in spite of this Selvon shows through Moses' career, the difficulties for the post-colonial of ridding himself of the dominant discourse in terms of both his own interpellation within it, and because institutionally it functions always to bolster and reconstitute its own power in the face of subversive challenges to its authority. As the parody of Lamming's title and Caliban's words ('water *for* berries') stresses, the interaction remains a politically unequal one.

What Selvon has however achieved (in spite of Moses' descent) is a complete destabilisation of centrist systems and an exposure of their pretensions to the axiomatic. By re-entering the text of *Robinson Crusoe* (and to a lesser extent *The Tempest*), the assumptions on which they rest and the paradigms they reflect and construct, Selvon destabilises the dominant discourse through exposure of its strategies and offers a Trinidadian/Caribbean post-colonial counter-discourse which is perpetually conscious of its own ideologically constructed subject position and speaks ironically from within it.

From his first novel, *Dusklands*, to his latest, *Foe*, the white South African writer, J.M. Coetzee, has been engaged in a lengthy and profound intertextual dialogue with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. This

dialogue with *Robinson Crusoe* involves not just the subversion of the imperial perspective imposed on white South Africans themselves, but the subversion of the perpetuated and amplified imperial impulses in the white settler communities which have resulted in the continuing obscenities of legal Apartheid in South Africa today. As Sheila Roberts notes, a number of Coetzee's novels catalogue the powerlessness and inefficacy of the white liberal position in the face of an intransigent white majority.[18] In *In the Heart of the Country*, for instance, the female castaway, Magda, fantasizes the killing of her father. In the course of the novel, she perpetually imagines his death, dismemberment and burial only to find he will not be got rid of:

> I find my father his broth and weak tea. Then I press my lips to his forehead and fold him away for the night. Once upon a time I used to think that I would be the last one to die. But now I think that for some days after my death he will still lie here breathing, waiting for the nourishment. (137)

The heritage of imperialism in such an intransigent white regime is not so easily disposed of. Magda's desire to rid herself of the father proceeds from the white liberal impulse to communicate with her slave/servants, Klein Anna and Hendrik; to escape the inescapable (and heritable) constraints of such a history, to rewrite the terms of the relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday and the linguistic, epistemological and ontological assumptions within which these relations are constructed and embedded. But the codes of the father have inevitably ensnared the daughter — she cannot escape perpetuating them. Like Crusoe she renames her servant; she resorts to the gun as means of control. She cannot escape the fate of the solitary 'castaway' whose ability to function in a relationship with 'others' is circumscribed by the inherited codes which subvert attempts to escape its hierarchical binary structurations — to be 'neither master nor slave ... but the bridge between' (p. 133).

Language, text and author/ity and the discursive fields within which these operate, become the subject of *Foe*. The complicity between narrative mode and political oppression, specifically the cryptic associations of historicism and realism in European and South African white settler narratives, enables Coetzee to demonstrate the pernicious political role of texts in the continuing oppression of blacks and hence the importance of their dis/mantling. Where Selvon's subversive technique depended on the multiple voices overriding the single dominant voice, Coetzee speaks from within a white liberal position where politics and censorship still stifle Friday's voice, a world in which Friday is *legislated* the slave of Crusoe; and where Crusoe lives in a self-generated terror of

the 'barbarian' footprint in the sand. Friday, if he is able to speak at all, must speak only in the 'language' of Crusoe, and Coetzee, who is able to speak, is not prepared (rightly in my view) to do so for Friday. Instead he chooses to dramatize the oppressive structures which have rendered blacks voiceless: Friday has had his tongue cut out by person or persons unknown before the 'events' of the novel unfold. Coetzee's account also raises the problem of white liberal complicity in this voicelessness, and the ways in which Friday has been *constructed* as voiceless by the European and continuing colonial writing of South African his/story.

Coetzee adopts the earlier form of De Foe's name (De Foe was slmost forty when he added the 'De'), but the root meaning of the word, like the elusiveness and bankruptcy of the character Foe carries a wealth of significance. In *Foe* 'Cruso' as a character disappears relatively early in the novel, dying as the 'captive' of Susan Barton, the female castaway who has insisted on rescuing him (and Friday) from the island. Cruso dies aboard the ship bound for England, but not before certain important aspects of the relations between him and Friday have been rewritten by Coetzee. Cruso (who may or may not have been responsible for the cutting out of Friday's tongue) has 'taught' Friday to respond to no more of his language than is needed for him to obey orders and fetch and dig. And just as the beginnings of economic individualism, the rise of middle-class values and the birth of the work ethic are discursively fixed by the original *Robinson Crusoe* and undermined in *Foe* (Crusoe obsessively builds barren terraces for something to do), so the myth of a 'liberal' and paternalistic imperialism embodied in the relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday in Defoe's work is thus rewritten. In the original novel 'I was greatly delighted with him, Friday and made it my Business to teach him everything, that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful; but especially to make him speak and understand me when I spake, and he was the aptest Schollar. ... It was very pleasant to me to talk to him.'[19]

In *Foe*, however, the practicalities and ruthlessness of this arrangement are exposed. When Susan Barton arrives on the island she is carried by the trained Friday to Crusoe's abode on his back. The black man's burden Friday inherits from Cruso is to become in turn the captive of Susan Barton. The history of European imperialism in Africa and its contemporary South African legacy are here depicted. Although Crusoe falls sick and dies, Barton, acting out of motives she regards as benevolent, insists Friday needs to be 'rescued' from the island because he cannot fend for himself, in spite of the fact that it is Friday who has always done the 'fending' for his master and Barton. In England Friday

and Barton are poor and cold as they become 'characters in search of a bankrupt author'. They are now yoked for life (Barton cannot return 'Friday' to Africa — to any pre-colonised state of cultural purity) and she has absolute control of the *interpretations* of Friday's actions and motives. As she and the 'author', Foe, wrestle to control the 'truth' of her narrative, in the later sections of the novel, their competing interpretative quests are frustrated by the silence of Friday and by their futile and contradictory attempts to interpret his actions. The cutting out of his tongue has become the central 'mystery' of the tale, not the time on the island or the long-lost-mother motif. Increasingly it is the 'dark Hole' that swallows every other traditional narrative possibility into its vortex. While for Susan (and perhaps Cruso) it remains *the* mystery, to the reader it is the explanatory force behind narrative itself. This is no doubt why Foe, although he is interested in Friday and Friday's 'mystery' is less so than Susan; he is in fact *the* 'foe' who has originally cut out Friday's tongue, capturing him in *Robinson Crusoe* and perpetuating that capture in the discursive strategies that characterise the colonialist text and colonialist practice.

Foe is a narrative about the construction of the Other by European codes, but it is also concerned with the perpetuation and continuing application of these codes in post-colonial settler colonies (e.g. US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and, in particular, South Africa).

Throughout *Foe* Susan Barton is associated with slave owners (she confesses she understands why Cruso and all slave owners wish to keep their slaves in subjection) and Foe asks her a question white Australians might ask of each other in relation to Aboriginal peoples: 'As it was a slaver's stratagem to rob Friday of his tongue, may it not be a slaver's stratagem to hold him in subjection while we cavil over words in a dispute we know to be endless?'[20]

And Susan herself concludes:

> If he was not a slave, was he nevertheless not the helpless captive of my desire to have our story told? How did he differ from one of the wild Indians whom explorers bring back with them, in a cargo of parakeets and golden idols and indigo and skins of panthers, to show they have truly been to the Americas? (pp. 150-51)

Though Susan desires to 'have our iie. hers and Friday's story told', she forgets Friday in her catalogue of the 'substantial', just as South African settler novelists, Schreiner and Smith, fail to address the problem of integrating the dispossessed blacks into the idyll (or in Schreiner's case the counter-idyll) of African pastoralism.[21] Coetzee solves the problem by continually rehearsing Friday's silence itself as the interpretative problem

which fractures all the potential narratives Barton and Foe attempt to construct. In the final chapter of the novel he dispenses with the author, Foe, whose image now coalesces with that of the Captain, Cruso/e, and all of white slaving imperial history and its complicit narrativization, and with the female 'castaway' Susan Barton. The 'I' narrator now becomes 'Coetzee', who, as author, is still necessarily the 'foe' of alterity, but who now situates himself directly in relation to Friday and Friday's potential for speech.

> Hauling myself hand over hand down the trunks, I descend, petals floating around me like a rain of snowflakes.
>
> The dark mass of the wreck is flecked here and there with white. It is huge, greater than the leviathan: a hulk shorn of masts, split across the middle, banked on all sides with sand. The timbers are black, the hole even blacker that gives entry. ...
>
> I had not thought the sea could be dirty. But the sand under my hands is soft, dank, slimy, outside the circulation of the waters...
>
> In the black space of this cabin the water is still and dead, the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago. Susan Barton and her dead captain, fat as pigs in their white nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion, held out in blessing, float like stars against the low roof. I crawl beneath them.
>
> In the last corner, under the transoms, half buried in sand, his knees drawn up, his hands between his thighs, I come to Friday.
>
> I tug his wooly hair, finger the chain about his throat. 'Friday,' I say, I try to say, kneeling over him, sinking hands and knees into the ooze, 'what is this ship?'
>
> But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday.
>
> He turns and turns till he lies at full length, his face to my face. The skin is tight across his bones, his lips are drawn back. I pass a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in.
>
> His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face. (pp. 156-157)

By taking as his subject, throughout his novels, the representations by which South Africa has interpreted itself to itself and in *Foe* those by which *Coetzee* had earlier represented these representations Coetzee writes texts that are necessarily allegorical, intertextual, allusive — texts that are meta-counter-discursive.

But concerned as they are with textuality, with language and with reading of signs, they are deeply *situated* culturally and politically. All his works represent direct engagements with the South African situation and

the history which produced it. And they are texts which consciously and constantly engage with their own speaking position in that situation. In doing so they invoke the importance of texts in the material capture and annihilation of alterity and by forcing re-readings of fiction through history and history through fiction they emphasize the complicity of western narrative and history in that process, deliberately eschewing an apparently transparent 'realism'.

In *In the Heart of the Country* Magda concludes that the only way to bury her father is to 'pull him in, to climb in first and pull him in after me' (p. 92). In *Foe*, Coetzee 'buries' liberal white South Africa (Magda) and the father (England/Defoe/Robinson Crusoe) by stressing the intertextual complicities of history, politics, European texts, and settler colony narratives through a reading of one within the terms of the other, acknowledging in *Foe* that the author of a text, specifically texts dealing with racial or cultural alterity, is by definition always the 'foe'. In an article on the *plaasroman*, Coetzee notes the dangers inherent in the kind of reading of two novels he has just undertaken in this way: 'It is a mode of reading which, subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn.'[22]

This is the danger Terdiman found characteristic of nineteenth-century French subversions and the one which I suggest post-colonial texts resist. Post-colonial inversions of imperial formations in *Wide Sargasso Sea, Moses Ascending, Foe* are deliberately provisional; they do not overturn or invert the dominant in order to become dominant in their turn, but to question the foundations of the ontologies and epistemological systems which would see such binary structures as inescapable.

'Genuine change', Wilson Harris suggests, proceeds (as does his own fiction) through a series of 'infinite rehearsals' whereby counter-discourses seek not just to expose and 'consume' the biases of the dominant, but to erode their *own* biases. Coetzee shows the dangers of writing of Friday and *for* Friday, and locates the 'enemy' in imperial and colonial narratives which interpret and lock alterity within European codes of recognition and their dominant discursive practices. Through a series of almost infinite inversions, Selvon deflates Moses' hopes of changing places with Crusoe/Prospero and, more significantly, destroys the foundations upon which Crusoe's dominance rested.

NOTES

1. Chinweizu, Onwiuchekwu Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* (Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1980; rpt. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).
2. Dennis Lee, *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (Toronto: Anansi, 1977). See particularly pp. 32-3.
3. Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985). Terdiman theorizes the potential and limitations of counter-discursive literary revolution within a dominant discourse noting that counter-discourses have the power to *situate*: to relativise the authority and stability of a dominant system of utterances which cannot even countenance their existence (pp. 15-16). But Terdiman regards counter-discourses as ultimately unable to effect genuine revolution, since they are condemned to remain marginal to the dominant discourse. The post-colonial situation is a rather different one, however, from that which provides Terdiman with his model.
4. Wilson Harris, 'Adversarial Contexts and Creativity', *New Left Review*, 154 (Nov-Dec 1985), p. 127.
5. S.S. Prawer, *Comparative Literary Studies: An Introduction* (London: Duckworth, 1973), pp. 10-11.
6. Ibid., p. 2.
7. Ibid., p. 7.
8. Homi Bhabha, 'Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism' in *The Theory of Reading*, ed. Frank Gloversmith (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), p. 96.
9. Russell M. Brown, 'Critic, Culture, Text: Beyond Thematics', *Essays in Canadian Writing*, No. 11 (Summer 1978) 176.
10. See for instance J. Michael Dash, 'Marvellous Realism: the Way out of Negritude', *Caribbean Studies*, 13, 4 (1973), and Stephen Slemon, 'Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse', forthcoming *Canadian Literature*, 1987.
11. Stephen Slemon, 'Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, forthcoming 1988. See also his 'Revisioning Allegory: Wilson Harris's *Carnival*', *Kunapipi*, 8, 2 (1986), 45-55.
12. Terdiman, p. 80.
13. Michel Pecheux (in *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, 1975; trans. Harbans Nagpal, London: Macmillan, 1982, p. 158) uses the term 'disidentification' to denote a transformation and displacement of the subject position interpellated by a dominant ideology.
14. Chinua Achebe, 'The Novelist as Teacher', *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1975), pp. 167-74.
15. Wilson Harris in 'Comedy and Modern Allegory: A Personal View of the Revival of Dantesque Scenes in Modern Fiction', paper delivered at the VIIIth Annual Conference of the Associazione Italiana di Anglistica at the University of Turin, 29 October 1985, notes of hiw own work that 'one novel may pick up something in the fabric of a previous work and rehearse its implications anew, revise, revision itself'. The title of Harris' latest novel is *The Infinite Rehearsal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).

16. Edward Baugh, 'Friday in Crusoe's City: the Question of Language in Two West Indian Novels of Exile', in Satendra Nandan, ed., *Language and Literature in Multicultural Contexts* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1983), p. 51.
17. Samuel Selvon, *Moses Ascending* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975), p. 122. All quotations are from this edition.
18. Sheila Roberts, 'Character and Meaning in Four Contemporary South African Novels', *WLWE*, 19, 1 (Spring, 1980), 19-36.
19. Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Strange Adventures Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner,* ed. J. Donald Crowley (London: O.U.P. World's Classics Series, 1981), p. 210.
20. J.M. Coetzee, *Foe* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986), p. 150. All quotations are from this edition.
21. J.M. Coetzee, 'Farm Novel and *Plaasroman* in South Africa', *English in Africa*, 13, 2 (Oct 1986), p. 8.
22. Ibid., p. 17.

SAM SELVON

Finding West Indian Identity in London

When I left Trinidad in 1950 I had been working as a journalist with the *Trinidad Guardian* for five years. During that time I started to write poems and short stories. The first payment I ever received for my writing was a cheque for two guineas from the BBC's Caribbean Voices programme produced by Henry Swanzy, which I treasured for months as a marvel before cashing it.

I was earning enough with the newspaper job to find myself being lulled into complacency and acceptance of the carefree and apathetic life around me. And that was the main reason why I decided to go to London, very much a young man, to seek my fortune.

I wrote to Henry Swanzy, who encouraged the move, and asked him to hold on to a payment of ten guineas the BBC owed for a short story. I was hopeful that my little writing experience would help, but I was prepared